

Introduction

Rail approach

There is no statutory requirement for the County Council to produce a Rail Strategy in support of the second Local Transport Plan (LTP2), and thus it does not carry the same weight as the Bus and Information Strategies. However, such is the importance of rail transport, both passenger and freight, to the economy of Hampshire that it is considered necessary to include it here.

The Council recognises the benefits of its pro-active stance in relation to the rail industry, which helps both to shape and influence policy in many areas including infrastructure planning, timetables and station facilities. This follows the view that there is value in treating the railways as an equal partner to buses in terms of transport planning considerations within LTP2 horizons.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out a vision for the rail network, to identify the challenges, which must be confronted, and to demonstrate how, by working in partnership with the rail industry, this can be achieved.

Vision – and how it is to be realised

Vision

A vision of rail as a key element of a public transport system, offering a viable alternative to the private car, depends on an affordable package of measures, which deliver the required service frequencies and appropriate levels of comfort.

For freight, the vision is of rail being used to its maximum capability on container flows from Southampton and for the conveyance of block loads of suitable commodities. The aim is to divert additional HGV traffic from the roads to achieve environmental benefits in terms of reducing congestion and pollution.

Delivering the vision

The County Council will work in partnership with the restructured rail industry to ensure that there is continual improvement in the quality of journey on offer and that rail plays its full role in the delivery of wider strategic objectives for the county.

The approach to achieving the objectives for rail will be to **reduce** problems to manageable proportions by prioritising, to **manage** programmes for positive change, and to **invest** where necessary.

Hampshire County Council will take account of the impact of spatial strategy and land use, together with the implications of the South East Plan, in considering rail connections for new developments.

The station facilities budget will target investment at those features for which there is a demonstrable need that is unlikely to be met by the market, such as improved signage, waiting shelters at smaller stations and cycle storage provision.

Objectives

The County Council's key objectives in relation to rail are:

- To improve accessibility to and security on the rail network.
- To provide an effective alternative to the private car.
- To secure better integration with other modes of transport.
- To work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders.
- To deliver a continual improvement in the quality of service.
- To ensure that the full potential of rail is utilised in the delivery of sustainable economic growth and regeneration.
- To increase productivity by facilitating long distance travel to Heathrow, Gatwick and the ports by rail.
- To improve interchange and connectional possibilities.
- To ensure the effects of any proposed change in passenger services do not have an adverse effect on existing or potential freight capacity.

The County Council's role

The County Council neither possesses the assets nor has the power to specify services or pricing. Its primary inputs involve consultation for service changes, influencing timetables, instigating studies into new stations or reopening proposals and co-sponsoring improvements to station facilities. The Council does not support rail services financially, and the only sums allocated for rail comprise a modest station facilities budget of approximately £100K per annum.

Rail often provides the only viable alternative to the use of the private car for longer distance journeys, and therefore is key in attempts to encourage a modal shift and lessen the impact of growing traffic levels. When successfully integrated with other modes, including walking and cycling, rail enhances the accessibility of an area and can stimulate economic activity.

Recent changes in the structure of the industry, notably abolition of the Strategic Rail Authority, means that the County Council must redefine its relationship and role in relation to the provision of rail services and facilities as part of its Rail Strategy.

The rail network in Hampshire



Current situation – passenger

Description of services

The county’s rail network forms a vital component of the South East’s transport network. Services are predominantly geared towards London for commuter and business travel. Direct intercity services connect key settlements in the county to Reading, Birmingham, the North and Scotland along with Bristol and South Wales.

To the south of the county the conurbations of Southampton and Portsmouth have their own commuter and leisure flows, as increasingly do Basingstoke and Winchester.

There are direct services from Southampton to Gatwick Airport via Fareham and Havant. Heathrow can be accessed by a dedicated express bus link from Woking station. In the medium term, the AirTrack scheme is expected to provide direct rail access to Heathrow from the south, via interconnection at Woking. The growth of low-cost airlines operating out of Southampton has resulted in a considerable increase in rail journeys to Southampton Airport Parkway. In addition rail also serves a number of smaller towns and settlements, mainly through local stopping services operating between the larger conurbations.

Capacity

Rail patronage in Hampshire is growing at 5% per annum compared to road growth of 1%. The Government plans no significant rail investment for the next five years. While capacity is already at or near saturation on peak journeys to and from London, there is room to accommodate growth in local and off-peak journeys. The ability to capitalise on this situation is constrained by a lack of car parking capacity at many stations. Selective expansion of car park capacity will be supported at appropriate locations.

Investment is essential to maintaining good links to the international gateways and contributing to national productivity.

Franchise situation

Hampshire is currently served by five franchised passenger Train Operating Companies (TOCs); South West Trains (SWT), Southern, Wessex Trains, Virgin Cross Country (VXC) and First Great Western Link (FGW Link). Of the 49 stations in the county, SWT are responsible for the operation of 42, Wessex Trains three, and FGW and Southern two each. VXC has an access agreement with SWT.

Changes to the franchise map for Hampshire will occur over succeeding years. The Wessex and FGW Link franchises will be subsumed within a new Greater Western franchise from April 2006, and the new South Western franchise replacement takes effect from February 2007. The VXC franchise is also due to terminate within the next three years. This provides opportunities to consult with potential franchisees for all these routes and influence service provision.

Freight

The County Council has an increasing involvement in rail freight industry matters. Three freight TOCs operate over the county's network; English, Welsh & Scottish Railway (EWS), GB Railfreight (GBRf) and Freightliner. Principal traffic comprise deep sea containers to and from Southampton Docks, import and export cars

through Southampton, oil traffic from Fawley refinery and Holybourne, and military traffic at Marchwood Military Port and Ludgershall (Wiltshire), the latter served from Andover. There is a major freight hub at Eastleigh.

The County Council is keen to encourage more freight onto the railway. In partnership with Southampton City Council, Transport Innovation Funding is being sought from the Department for Transport for gauge enhancement between Southampton and the Midlands. This would allow taller (HiCube) containers to be conveyed on standard height wagons. This will permit rail to compete more effectively with road haulage and enable rail's market share of Southampton container traffic to be maintained and grow.

Problems and issues

Overcrowding in the peak and palliative measures

Limited track capacity and a lack of available train paths in the peak, means that increasing train formations constitutes the only way to accommodate more passengers. Many trains are already at maximum length, and no spare rolling stock is available to lengthen the remainder.

Pricing could be used by the Train Operating Companies as a mechanism to 'manage' peak numbers downwards to fit capacity, but this would be an unpopular measure with Government sanction required. The expected effect would be to transfer the problem to the shoulders of the peak period where adequate capacity is also a concern.

The Department for Transport (DfT) is known to be investigating the long-term potential for double-deck trains, which are widely used for suburban services on the Continent where the loading gauge (kinetic envelope) is more generous. Due to clearance problems resulting from the numbers of bridges and tunnels encountered, double-deck trains would be severely limited in their sphere of operation in Britain. The Waterloo to Basingstoke corridor has potential to be developed into a suitable route, since it has no tunnels.

In the shorter term, the Eurostar double-length platforms at Waterloo will become available for alternative use when international services are transferred to St Pancras in 2007. The Department for Transport is considering the options for future use of the Eurostar platforms. One idea, which has been mooted, is for 'mega-length' limited-stop trains, in effect 'peak busters'. To comply with current rail safety legislation, platforms would need to be lengthened at stations served, hence the limitation on stopping places.

In the longer term, the DfT and Network Rail will need to consider infrastructure improvements to address specific constraints to the number of train services that can be accommodated and provide increased capacity. Pinch-points have been identified on the twin tracks from Worthing Junction through Winchester to Shawford Junction, through Southampton tunnel and on the single line from Farnham to

Alton. Others are closer to London, but have an effect on Hampshire's services including Woking Junction, the platform lines at Clapham Junction and on the approaches to Waterloo.

Accommodating future growth

While the overall trend is for growth at 5% per annum, exacerbating the problems referred to above, another significant factor for Hampshire, which will fuel increased demand for travel, is the Government's intentions for the location of new housing.

Within the South East Plan, the Regional Assembly has set a house building target for Hampshire of 6,100 new homes every year during the 20 year period 2006–2026. These would be allocated as follows:

South Hampshire	4,000 new homes per year
North Hampshire	1,300 new homes per year
Central Hampshire and New Forest	800 new homes per year

Within the first two sub-regional areas, significant extra employment would also be allocated so as to discourage further long-distance commuting. It is expected that rail will play a part in supporting these growth areas.

Capacity exists to cater for an increase in commuting to Southampton and Portsmouth in the peak.

Station improvement

Stations are the customers' initial interface with the railway and it is vital that first impressions do not constitute a deterrent to travel. The TOCs generally concentrate their attention and resources on the major transport hubs. County Council review of the situation at smaller stations should ensure that a clean and modern appearance is maintained. A small station facilities budget of £100k per annum is used to supplement minor infrastructure work such as the provision of cycle racks and lockers and waiting shelters at smaller stations where a need can be established.

Disabled access at stations

There are many Hampshire stations where the geographical layout historically has prevented level access to platforms. Under Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) legislation, the TOCs are responsible for providing adequate access for all the County Council will be examining with them how this can be achieved.

How the rail strategy meets LTP2 objectives

The LTP2 objectives will be achieved in the following way:

Accessibility – making rail stations and services more accessible, both in terms of DDA compliance and general accessibility through improved interchanges with other modes (buses, cycling and walking). By working with the Council's transport operating partners an effective package of information and marketing tools can be built which together can raise awareness of public transport options and accessibility.

Where these measures alone are insufficient to produce growth in patronage, selective increases in station car park provision will be considered.

Congestion relief – by making maximum use of Hampshire's rail network, a contribution will be made to easing congestion on the road network, which will have an advantageous effect on road safety and air quality.

Rail passenger journeys in Hampshire are predicted to increase by at least 5% between base year 2003/04 and 2010/11. This represents a slow-down in the rate of increase compared with the 19% growth recorded between 1999/00 and 2003/04 and reflects the fact that the rail network is approaching capacity in the peaks. Uncertainty with respect to the location of major housing developments in Hampshire is another contributory factor. If major development occurs close to existing or planned rail stations, the growth predictions could be exceeded.

Taking this into account, the strategy concentrates on increasing journeys within Hampshire where potential for increasing capacity exists, eg between Southampton, Fareham and Portsmouth. Approximately 60% of rail journeys emanating in Hampshire are between Hampshire stations.

Efforts by the TOCs to encourage greater use of off-peak capacity are constrained by the lack of availability of car park space after 09.00. Rural stations in particular suffer from poor public transport access as an alternative to the car with low population densities in the local catchment areas.

Targets

With no direct control over the county's rail network, targets are of necessity more limited in scope than for other passenger transport modes. County Council involvement has focused on the provision of station facilities and improving the ease of access/egress.

To facilitate this process the Hampshire Rail Infrastructure Blueprints developed six categories of rail station:

- **Intersection:** where services from two or more passenger rail routes meet.
- **Interchange:** between local and long-distance train services, or between rail and air or ferry.

- **Large Urban:** serving a large town or city, with a population of 20,000 or more, and generating sufficient revenue to support all-day staffing and station facilities as commercial investment.
- **Secondary Urban:** station within a large town or city, in the catchment area (within acceptable walking distance) of a larger station.
- **Small Urban:** either a station serving a town or settlement of less than 20,000, or serving a larger settlement but not generating sufficient revenue to support all-day staffing. Likely to have substantial unrealised potential, but not enough to attract substantial commercial investment.
- **Rural:** station in a rural area, generally serving a 'village', or a settlement of less than 3,000 population.

Eligibility for funding new facilities are defined by station category with increased provision for the larger stations.

Targets will be established for the level of facilities to be provided at each category of station and regular audits carried out to monitor progress towards the target levels.

Journey satisfaction targets will be established for passengers beginning or ending their journey within the county. Whilst the County Council has no direct control over service patterns and delivery, it is a key player in the consultation process on timetable amendments and investment in station facilities. Monitoring of satisfaction levels will ensure the County Council and its industry partners are working effectively towards delivering a rail service that matches the needs of residents and visitors alike.

While compliance with the DDA in respect of stations is the responsibility of the train operating companies, the County Council will monitor progress and apply pressure where warranted.

Perceptions of personal security when travelling can significantly influence the modal choice. Fear of crime, graffiti, vandalism and litter may present a barrier to rail travel. The environment in and around the station is of key importance, especially on pedestrian/cycle approaches and in station car parks. County Council will work in partnership with train operators, Hampshire Constabulary, industry bodies and other relevant stakeholders to reduce incidents of crime in and around railway stations. Consideration will be given according to the station categories described above.

The road to achievement

Many factors have a bearing on the overall situation with regard to rail development in Hampshire. These include:

- The national economic position of the Western Corridor Blackwater Valley and Solent studies.
- Regional spatial strategy, and the need to accommodate growth.

- Regional Transport Strategy.
- Local Transport Plan.
- Forthcoming Regional Planning Assessments.
- The franchise position.
- Route Utilisation Studies being undertaken by Network Rail.
- Transport Innovation Fund.
- The Regional Transport Board, which covers rail investment.

To meet the objectives and targets for the rail network the County Council will work with the Department for Transport, Network Rail, TOCs, the Government Office for the South East, developers and a range of other stakeholders.

The opportunity exists at this critical moment to identify what future infrastructure is needed, and to influence these ongoing studies and strategy formulations.

With the aim of making best use of available capacity and services, the possibility of new or reopened stations may feature in the plans. Any proposal for enhanced services will be subject to the appropriate demand estimation and/or market research. This will ensure that proposals are viable and in line with other modal considerations.

Aspirations

Promoting off-peak travel

On-train capacity for off-peak journeys is constrained by a lack of car parking at many stations. The TOCs are keen to increase station car park provision where there is a known shortfall. At such locations, parking on streets close to the station becomes a problem for residents and a concern for the local authority. Better integration with bus services and improved access for cyclists and pedestrians to rail stations will continue to be sought. Environmental factors mitigating against station car park expansion will be balanced against the promotion of rail travel as an environmentally-friendly mode of transport.

SDA's and Rail

The designation of Strategic Development Areas (SDA's) to the north of Hedge End and north of Fareham, as part of the South Hampshire Strategy, provides significant opportunities for rail to support the growth agenda. Both of these SDA's will need to be linked to the adjacent cities (Southampton and Portsmouth respectively). In the case of Hedge End North, the development will allow greater use to be made of the local station, opened in 1989 as part of the South Hampshire electrification scheme.

Its full potential will only be realised, however, if a frequent level of train service is able to run directly to Southampton. This will involve replacing sections of double track, which were singled as an economy measure at the time of electrification.

Eastleigh Chord line proposal

The impending closure of the Alstom Engineering Works at Eastleigh permits re-assessment of the Eastleigh Chord proposal, to link the Hedge End line with the Waterloo–Bournemouth main line. This would enable trains from Portsmouth and the east to serve Southampton Airport in addition to Southampton Central, freeing up capacity on the coastal line to Portsmouth via Swanwick and Fareham.

Alton line infrastructure enhancement

The County Council will lobby for enhancement of rail infrastructure on the Alton line west of Farnham. This is currently a single track with a passing loop at Bentley. Upgrading would improve train performance and punctuality and provide capacity for additional freight movements to Holybourne sidings, including possible future flows connected with the MRF facility.

Bus/Rail integration

The County Council will seek to develop further bus/rail integration schemes, better integrated ticketing based on the successful Solent Travelcard, currently confined to bus services, and to lobby for bus links to rail services, eg Yateley–Farnborough.

Community Rail

Initial consultation with stakeholders has identified the possibility of designating the branch line from Brockenhurst to Lymington Pier as a Community Railway. SWT and the DfT in conjunction with the County Council and local district councils are exploring this. The aim is to produce a railway which is sustainable and contributes to a vibrant local and rural economy.

Refurbished heritage units with additional cycle space and disabled passenger facilities have already been introduced on the line by SWT at their initiative. These will reduce operating costs significantly compared with leasing modern Desiro units. The 'heritage' aspect fits in well with the expectations of visitors to the area and gives plenty of scope for creative marketing for tourism and for community involvement.

Examination of different scenarios for future operation of the line will be part of the evaluation process. A scheme may be trialled on the line, subject to a robust business case being developed. If successful the Community Rail principle could be rolled out at selected smaller stations elsewhere in the county.

Railway stations could become the focal point of their communities and the activities concentrated there increase community engagement, promote improved accessibility and social inclusion, and be a deterrent to vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Increased awareness of the facility in turn encourages greater use of the train service, and greater 'buy in' by the local community.

Capital programme

The County Council's capital programme for the LTP2 period allocates funding to projects that deliver improvements to interchange between modes, safety at stations and customer information provision. These projects are jointly developed and funded with train operators.

2006/07 - £70,000

2007/08 - £75,000

2009/10 - £50,000

There are a number of larger projects in Hampshire's investment programme that will improve interchange facilities between rail and other modes.

2006/07 Basingstoke – Alencon Link bus/rail interchange improvements.
£350,000 external funding.

Southampton Airport Parkway interchange improvements. £193,000
external funding.